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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000120

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STATE DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

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SUBJECT: CUBA: 2006 MADRUGA PROTEST EXAMINED

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Classified By: COM Michael E. Parmly; Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary and Comment: USINT has reviewed a videotape filmed by a resident of the Havana provincial town of Madruga, which shows a spontaneous neighborhood protest against police seeking to evict a well-respected citizen from his home and extort from him all his valuable property. The event occurred last November; in December, an NGO in Miami and the Hungarian Ambassador to the USA gave an award to the citizens of Madruga for their courage. All this is fine, except that the Cuban regime has since hit back, with storm-trooper tactics that made Madruga residents understand they had better not try it again. USINT does not/not believe that change is likely to come to Cuba through widespread, organized street protests, at least not in the near term. However, there is much resentment beneath the surface that could make Madruga-style protests break out elsewhere on the island, most likely over economic or infrastructural shortcomings. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (C) P/E Counselor and Human Rights Officer were given a chance this past week to review a home video of a November 2, 2006 citizens revolt against Cuban authority in Madruga, located on the eastern edge of Havana Province. Madruga is a poor town of 11,000; at the time of the protest, the community was without water service for over a week, according to Norlan Perez Diaz (protect strictly), the man who shot the video. The sequence of events was roughly as follows:

-- Resident Eddy Hernandez Arencibia had raised enough money from a combination of raising pigs and remittances from relatives to build and furnish a new house in Madruga, enabling him to move his family there from a single room in his mother's house. Hernandez was/is highly regarded in Madruga; his side businesses had the effect of spreading money and friendship around the town.

-- Hernandez, now 36, had legal title to the property and to his piggery business, and sold the required quotas of pork to the GOC. However, he was also a member of the Cuban Liberal Movement (MLC), a peaceful pro-democracy group.

-- At the beginning of November, police visited Hernandez to shake him down, requiring him to either surrender the household effects and property he owned or pay a fee. He thought he had made a deal on a fee, but the GOC reneged on

the deal and sent police to the new house to evict him on November 2. The legal pretext they used was Law 149 on the "Confiscation of Property and Income Acquired by Illegal Means."

-- According to Norlan Perez, some 900 neighbors congregated in front of the house to protest the police action. In the video (of fair-to-poor quality, especially after sunset), you can see the crowd, and hear it break into chants of "We demand Justice," and "Eddie, our friend, the people are with you." (In Spanish: "Eddie, amigo, el pueblo esta contigo.")

-- Sometime after 10 pm, 20 police officers, who were allegedly intoxicated and not from Madruga, lined up in front of the house. Facing the police were 30 women, locking arms and backed up by men. According to eyewitness Yaneyvis Alvarez Sosa (please protect), an MLC member, the police advanced, swinging truncheons and hurting some of the women in their path. A male Madruga resident appealed for calm discussion but was attacked and beaten by six police officers. The crowd responded by raining rocks down upon the police, who fled. After the police left, members of the MLC celebrated and hung a Cuban flag and a banner that said "Deliver Water to Madruga" on the city's main welcoming sign.

¶3. (C) The Regime Strikes Back: The GOC fixed the water supply problem quickly, but struck back against individuals it suspected as being ringleaders of the protest. At 5 am on November 11, it sent in around 100 political police officers to break down doors/windows, roust suspects and haul them off to detention centers in Havana. Norlan Perez puts the number of detainees at 13; Yaneyvis Alvarez says eight were taken away. Four residents are believed to remain in detention: Alexander Lowi, Ivan Pardo Machado, Alexis Montero and Mario Guat. Eddie Hernandez himself had, by then, removed his property from the house in question and tried to flee Cuba in a makeshift boat, along with 57 others. On November 17, the

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U.S. Coast Guard repatriated 56 rafters from that group to Cuba. Hernandez and a colleague from Madruga, Fernando Batista Montero, were approved for secondary screening at the U.S. base at Guantanamo.

¶4. (U) Honors in Miami: On December 7, the Cuban Democratic Directorate and the Hungarian Ambassador to the USA, Andras Simonyi, bestowed the "Pedro Luis Boitel Freedom Prize" to the people of Madruga for their "civic valor." According to a press release by the Cuban Democratic Directorate, Jose Manuel Lopez Montero, a Cuban exile recently arrived from Madruga, accepted the prize on behalf of his home town.

¶5. (C) Comment: Our first impulse would be to try to beam to the world this videotape, which is excellent evidence that Cubans are not content with their police-state regime. Unfortunately, the footage of the Madruga protest is not of high quality. On the other hand, the story of what happened there has been spread by Cuba's active rumor mill, as well as by Radio Marti. It has become one point of reference for Cubans who seem less inhibited than before about protesting against authority on local issues, usually economic or infrastructural. Bad bus service is the most common source of grievances. We find it instructive that the Raul Castro-led dictatorship responded to Madruga by turning back on the town's water and then sending in Gestapo-like police. PARMLY